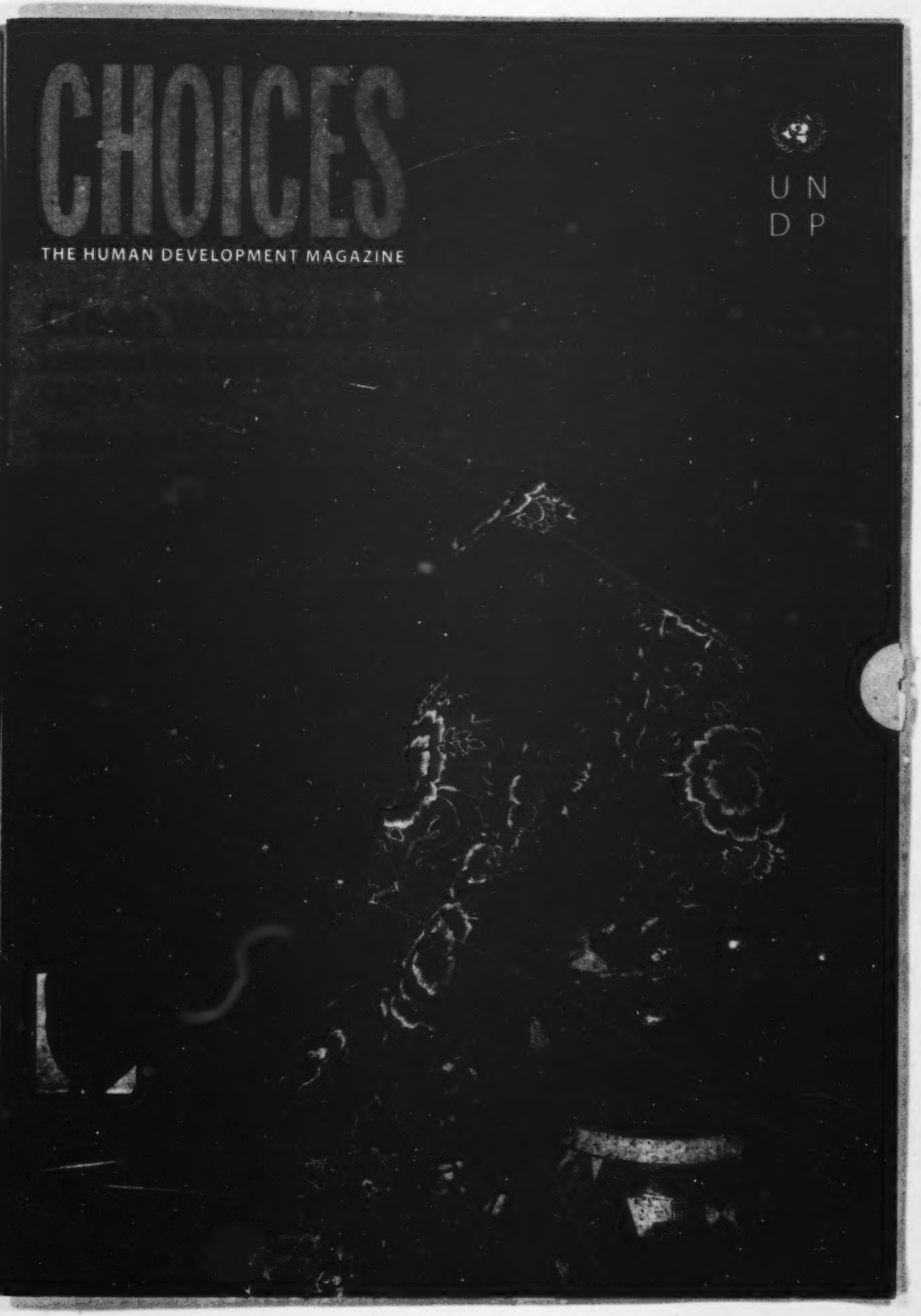
CHOICES

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

UNDP



Shannon Zanon/UNDP

Woman carrying water: An icon of poverty that can't disappear soon enough.

Carolyn Watson/UNICEF

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Clean, Accessible Water Makes a Big Difference

When I led a group of journalists from major western newspapers to the Mopti region of Mali, a rather poor, dry and remote area of West Africa, it occurred to me that some of the most basic changes could have the most far-reaching effects.

Even as we arrived in the area, which has probably looked the same for generations, something seemed different: new low-cost wells had been installed for the villagers. And the women, who once spent as much as six hours a day—every day—fetching water, now had the time to learn how to read and write, pursue income-generating activities and gardening. For the first time, some 12,000 women could experience the joy of more food and more money to send children to school, and an end to the agony of watching their children suffer from water-borne illnesses.

This long-awaited change was welcome. My earliest memories of growing up in Senegal always include the sight of women, carrying huge jugs of water on their heads, trudging long distances to fetch water. It was a way of life.

But that picture of the woman with the water jug—captured in many a photograph and painting—has become an icon, of sorts, for Africa. To me, it is not a pretty picture. It shows people, locked into circumstances that they cannot change, who must devote hours of time and toil looking after their most basic needs, without choices and without opportunities to improve their lives.

Change has come to my village, and thousands of others across Africa and Asia, and water has played a key role. Even where piped water doesn't reach every home, a tap or a well that provides clean water has transformed the way people live. The hours that were spent looking for water are now spent more productively on other activities.

But it is not the mere presence of a well or a pump that changes a village. In this issue of *CHOICES*, where we look at projects that have helped people gain access to clean water, we find that, almost more important than the infrastructure, is the community's ability to manage its water supply. In Niger, citizens have started to protect, rather than pollute, their freshwater ponds; in the Central African Republic, villagers' payments for water have generated a fund for civic improvements. We find that in Bangladesh and Haiti, people are working to manage their own water supply. In water-scarce Yemen, the authorities and the people are discovering that proper management of water supplies are critical for development efforts. Finally, in Belarus, we see how protecting freshwater ecosystems can promote jobs, ecotourism, and the preservation of natural habitats.

Change comes to CHOICES

Development is about change, and with this issue of *CHOICES*, we have made some big changes to the magazine itself which will allow us to present the results of development initiatives with greater detail and clarity. As you noticed already, you are holding the new look of *CHOICES*, which we hope will make reading and handling easier. No need to fold it to place it in your bags, briefcases or postal envelopes. But more important, are the changes on the inside. We have a new editor, Dan Shepard, and we have launched new sections, such as *World Development Roundup*, which looks at development news from around the world. And we have introduced *MDG Watch*, which will focus on the global campaign to meet the Millennium Development Goals agreed to by 189 world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. In this issue, we feature a special pullout on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, where we recognize some of the people who have made a difference in fighting poverty.

The core of our magazine will remain the same: we will continue to highlight development success stories. We will continue to seek out the stories where people have taken charge of their own lives and have shown that change is indeed possible.

Djibril Diallo

Cover: Oumou Mamadou, of Abuja, Niger, filtering water from the Niger River.
Photo: Rabo Yahaya/UNDP

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Coming in June

Earning a living can be difficult just about anywhere, but for people living in extreme poverty, it's almost impossible. In the June issue, CHOICES will highlight programmes that have given the poor a chance to earn a decent income and work their way out of poverty.

19 SPECIAL SECTION
The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

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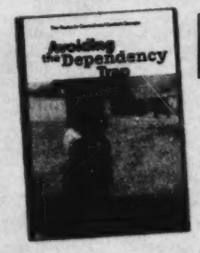
UNDP report calls for new approaches to assist Roma

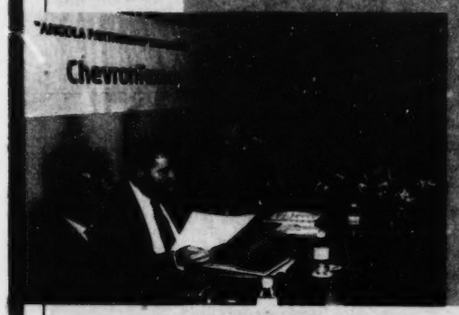


Finding that significant resources to assist Roma minorities in Europe and the CIS have failed to alleviate deplorable living conditions, a report released by UNDP, *Avoiding the Dependency Trap*, calls for new measures to overcome a culture of dependency.

Nearly half of the five million Roma surveyed are unemployed and close to one person in six is "constantly starving." Only six out of 10 households have running water, and fewer than half have toilets in their homes. Only a third of Roma surveyed completed primary school, only six percent completed secondary school and one percent attended college. More than two-thirds of Roma households in some countries derive their income primarily from government assistance, creating dependency and isolation, the report says.

UNDP joins Chevron Texaco to support small businesses in Angola

Officials from ChevronTexaco, UNDP and the Angolan Government at partnership signing.



Japan hosting World Water Forum

Japan is hosting the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto, Shiga and Osaka from 16-23 March. The high-level meeting will try to see how the agreements on water and sanitation made at the Johannesburg Summit can be implemented.

Ryutaro Hashimoto, Former Prime Minister of Japan and Chairman of Japan's National Steering Committee for the Forum, said he expected the Forum "to play a critical role in solving water issues in the 21st Century."

World Water Council
3rd World Water Forum

New funds for development

The Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is allocating $66.9 million over five years to boost HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention in Haiti, the first such grant in Latin America and the Caribbean and will be managed by UNDP and the *Fondation Sogebank*. Also:

- Donor countries pledged $905 million at a round table in Geneva to support Burundi's efforts to secure peace with rebel groups, promote fiscal stability, carry out relief and reconstruction, combat HIV/AIDS and reduce poverty.
- France is allocating one million Euros (slightly more than $1 million) to UNDP for a programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to demobilize former fighters under last August's peace accord.
- Japan announced that it will provide $1.03 million through the UN Trust Fund for Human Security for a UNDP initiative to protect adolescent girls in South Asia from trafficking and HIV/AIDS.

UNDP expands small arms collection efforts

UNDP's Small Arms and Demobilization Unit reported that it collected and destroyed 73,718 small arms and light weapons in 2002, along with 2,158,117 rounds of ammunition. In addition, the Unit reports that it has worked to reintegrate approximately 11,000 ex-combatants into society by providing alternative livelihoods. In the Republic of the Congo alone, more than 2,600 microenterprises have been established.

Donor support for the programme has grown, from $1.4 million in 2001 to more than $8 million in 2002, a growth rate of 600 percent. This support has attracted significant matching funding: in the Republic of the Congo, $350,000 in seed funding attracted $4.3 million in total contributions for the project.

UNDP's disarmanent efforts are collecting an increasing number of weapons, as more ex-combatants have returned to civilian life.

Clean Water: An Agent for Change

Water is hardly a new development priority: the search for clean water and improved sanitation is as old as human civilization. What is new is that the issue has suddenly, after years of relative neglect, been thrust to the top of the global agenda.

At last year's World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, world leaders not only endorsed water as one of United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan's five WEHAB priorities—the others being Energy, Health, Agriculture and Biodiversity—and committed to the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the proportion of people without access to safe, drinking water by 2015, but added a new one: halving the proportion of people without access to sanitation by the same date.

The reason for all the attention is not hard to understand. More than a billion people lack access to clean drinking water, and over 2.4 billion lack access to proper sanitary facilities. The result is that three out of every people in the world's poorest areas suffering from water-borne diseases than any other disease; at any time, more than half of the hospital beds in the world are filled with people suffering from water-borne diseases. Every year, millions children every year—4,000 a day—die from such infections. In China, India and Indonesia, where so many people die every year from diarrhoeal diseases as from HIV/AIDS.

At the same time, poorly managed water resources are also a source of conflict—over water access in water dispute between countries and environmental degradation. So addressing water needs can have a huge development payoff that reaches beyond health. Better provision, watershed management, to water supply management, investing in water and sanitation has a payoff that goes beyond just the infrastructure. Easily accessible clean water means that women and girls do not have to walk miles each day to fetch heavy buckets of muddy dirty water for use at home. Instead they can go to school or engage in productive activities. And as communities learn to manage their water resources, so can other pressures, such as economic activities, those competing to meet production or industry.

Recognizing the clear link between freshwater resources and poverty, access to water and sanitation, The European Union has pledged to increase the more than one billion Euros it already spends on water projects, particularly in Africa and the Commonwealth of Independent States countries, while the United States has announced that it will invest $970 million over three years for its "Water for the Poor Initiative" to expand access to clean water and sanitation services, improve watershed management, and increase the efficiency of water in industrial and agricultural activities. Japan, which has joined with the US in this initiative, has provided more than 40 million people with access to safe drinking water and sanitation in the past five years and Japan has also announced an initiative that aims to improve access to safe and stable water and sanitary sewage systems.

While well short of the kind of sums that will eventually be needed, this is a very encouraging start that arguably needs to be further built on at the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto and Osaka.

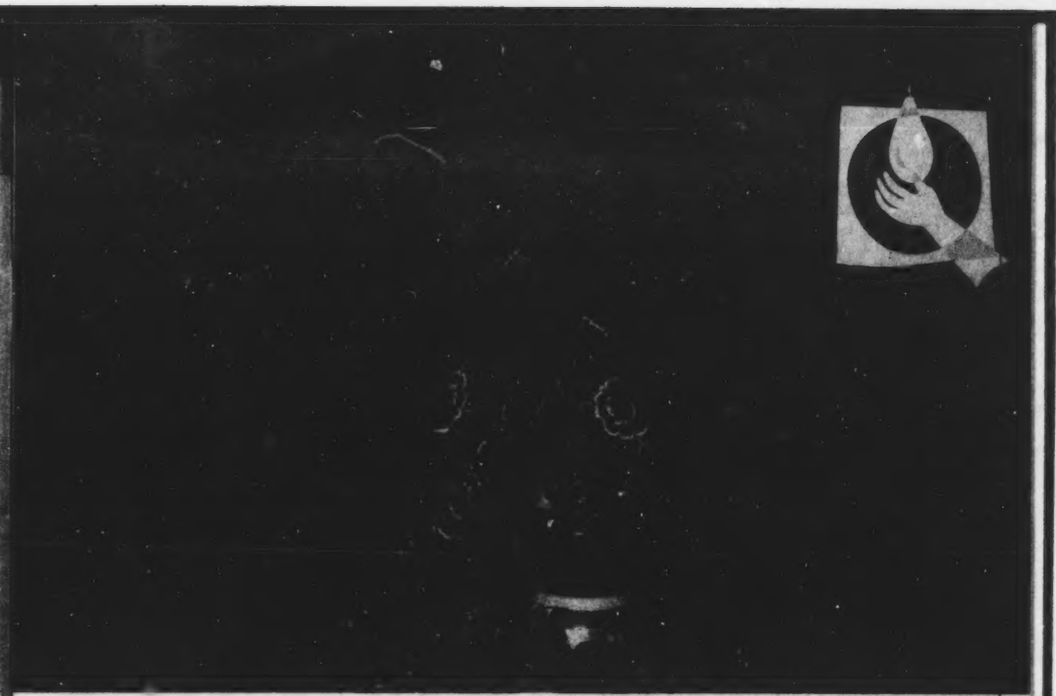
UNDP, too, is stepping up its environmental initiatives across the world—from improving the management of transboundary river systems, such as the Danube, Nile and Mekong rivers, to work at the community level, through initiatives aimed at expanding access to clean water and proper sanitation. We are also flexing our operating efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goal on water and sanitation through programmes such as the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme.

Cap-Net, a global capacity building network for water management, is helping countries better manage their water needs, and the Local Initiatives Facility for Urban Environment, which is helping people in slums from Bangladesh to Jamaica, Tanzania and Egypt to come together to identify, plan and implement their own solutions to their water and sanitation problems.

As this issue of CHOICES makes clear, while the challenges may be enormous, there are success stories from all over the world that we can learn from and build on to make sure that the world misses less all the Millennium Development Goals a miss.

Mark Malloch Brown is Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

Water Year 2003



Clean Water at the Heart of Fight Against Poverty in Niger

Increased access to clean water part of plan to promote sustainable development

BY GOREL HAROUNA

ALLIMBOULÉ, NIGER

It is late in the afternoon as Amintou Mohamed, a housewife and mother of six stands straight and still, her eyes fixed on the pond in front of her. A woman of medium height, she turns and walks steadily toward the village, and sits on a mat spread on the ground, in the shade of her home, beside her husband who is sitting on a wooden chair. To her left, also sitting on the ground, a man is making and serving tea. Mrs. Mohamed surveys the courtyard with a regal glance.

Next door, she sees her neighbour nursing her twins. Across the courtyard, women are giving their little ones a bath in water they have just boiled and filtered, while other women are doing laundry, washing dishes, or cooking with the treated water. And farther off, teenage boys with rods in their hands are shepherding sheep, kids and goats in pens.

"We have always depended on this pond," she says. "But now, it's like we're rediscovering it, with all its riches, advantages and potential. We are really lucky that it is right next to our village."

Mrs. Mohamed chairs the local water management committee under the decentralization programme at Allimboulé, a small village inhabited by Tuareg tribes in the Bankilare canton, located 243 kilometres west of Niamey, the capital.

Government decentralization is now mandated by Niger's four-year-old Constitution and the local water management committee in Allimboulé represents this effort, which is based on the principle of making the grassroots communities masters of their own development.

The 40-hectare pond at Allimboulé—much of it covered by reeds—is rich with fish and serves not only as a major gathering point for ibis, teal, ducks and other migratory birds, but also for people and cattle. For a long time the pond caused death and disease because of the filth and sewage in the water, but now it is a source of life, for both people and cattle.

Niger is one of the poorest countries of the world, where

Clean water and better hygiene have improved health conditions in Abuja.

more than 85 percent of the population lives on $2 or less a day; more than 40 percent do not use water from improved sources and only 20 percent have access to adequate sanitation.

Water is relatively scarce in Niger, with 75 percent of the country firmly in the grip of the Sahara Desert. The Niger River flows through the southwest as it hooks south, past Niamey, but its flow varies significantly from year to year depending on rainfall. The need for clean water and improved sanitation is growing, as the population, now at close to 11 million, continues to increase at the rate of 3.6 percent a year. Almost three-quarters of the population live in the southern edge of the country.

Only five wells served 8,000 people and even more cattle in Bankilare.

In an area that has experienced large-scale land degradation and water scarcity, the Allimboulé project is part of a larger 10-year effort funded by the Government of Niger and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to promote sustainable development in the Liptako-Gourma region, an area that also extends into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Mali. UNDP's partners in this project include the Programme for Poverty Alleviation and the National Environmental Plan for Sustainable Development (PNEDD).

The programme has succeeded in integrating water management decisions into all facets of community life, working to promote the role of women in decision-making, and stressing the importance of water as an economic resource that should not be taken for granted.

In Allimboulé, the local villagers have been able to reverse the damage to the pond and their drinking water and have begun to change some of their habits—thanks to training and awareness-raising sessions. Women were taught how to boil and filter water, and on seedling propagation while the men were instructed on technology and fisheries. Management committees were established and a fishing cooperative was started.

To protect the pond against silting, a forest management plan was adopted and windbreaks were established using saplings grown at a plant nursery managed by a village committee. The villagers tended the seedlings that have helped reduce the effects of wind and water erosion.

The biggest difference in the community, Mrs. Mohamed says, is the new fishing cooperative. "The Tuaregs have never before been even slightly interested in fish, let alone fishing," she says. Since they will not eat fish, they sell their entire catch.

Residents have cleaned up their pond to ensure a supply of clean water.

Community water management has provided greater opportunities for gardening and farming.

While the men are away fishing, a team from the water management committee makes its rounds of the banks of the pond every day to remove filth and animal carcasses.

Bringing water closer to home

The people in Allimboulé have at least always had the pond for water. Other villages, such as Ngari, in Bankilare, have not been so lucky. "We used to have to go either to Bankilare or Allimboulé to find water," says Hazami Hamed Ahmed, an Ngari resident. "We often left at dawn and returned home at midnight."

According to Mrs. Ahmed, the women of the village always bore the heavy burden of searching for drinking water. Riding on donkeys, often with young children in tow, they braved the elements to reach Allimboulé, 14 kilometres away, or the village of Bankilare, seven kilometres away, where a container of well water sold for 5 FCFA (less than one US cent). In Bankilare, only five wells served a population of 8,000, and women battled all day long for a can of water. "In the dry season, sometimes my friends and I had to spend the night waiting at the wells to be served," recalls Mrs. Ahmed.

Today, due to a dam built only six months earlier, there is water in Ngari. Local engineers built the dam with support from a Niger research group known as Senagrhy. Funding was provided by PNEDD and UNDP at a cost of nearly $54,000. The villagers provided unskilled labour under a "food for work" programme sponsored by the World Food Programme.

At the request of the villagers, the reservoir was stocked with fish. "This dam has completely transformed our way of life and our habits. There is real improvement," says Mrs. Ahmed. She has also been elected vice-chair of the Ngari water management committee. "Our village will soon become another centre. Development and well-being are guaranteed with the water."

Women take the lead

At Abuja, another village in Bankilare on the banks of the Niger River, the traditionally deferential women of the village decided to take their fate into their own hands while waiting for the completion of a water tower.

Three women, Oumou Mamadou, 35, Sofi Idrissa, 55, and Nafi Hamidou, 45, recalled the problems caused by a dependence on river water. "We drank water directly from the river, which caused a lot of disease. Stomach problems sometimes killed people because the river water had a lot of animal and other waste in it," says Mrs. Mamadou.

The three women were the first to accept training in sanitation and decentralized water management. They, in turn, have helped train other women of the village, and as a result, they were easily elected to the bureau of the local management committee for filtration, chlorination and sanitation.

The women also sell sanitary equipment.

"Now, nobody drinks river water before it has been treated!" they say in unison. ■

Gorel Harouna is a journalist from the Niger independent weekly Le Republicain.

Small dam under construction in Abuja.

Bangladesh

Slums Demand Access to Clean Water

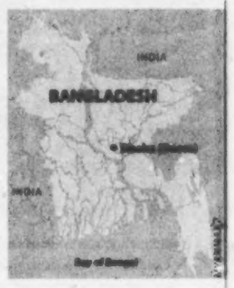
Working poor willing to pay for water

BY MOLLIKA WAHAB

KALYANPUR, BANGLADESH

Rasheda Begum, a 25-year old garment factory worker, pays one Taka (58 Takas = US$1) and presses a hand pump to get a bucket of clean water from a water outlet, just around the corner from where she lives.

One Taka for a 20-litre bucket of water is expensive considering that the municipality charges 4.50 Taka for 1,000 litres of water, but in this shantytown in Kalyanpur, a suburb of the Bangladesh capital Dhaka, it is a sign of progress for Mrs. Begum, who lives with her husband, small son and mother-in-law in a one-room tin shack.



Just five years ago the only sources of water for the slum's 500 families were wells and an intermittent supply from an illegally connected tap to the city's water utility. For drinking water, the women and children had to wait in line for up to two hours to collect a pitcher or bucket of water from a local market or nearby houses where they often had to bribe guards and caretakers, or pay exorbitant prices.

"We had to get up very early to get the water. We often incurred the wrath of husbands and in-laws when we were delayed," Mrs. Begum says.

Today the family uses water from a dug well behind their shack for bathing and washing, but for drinking and cooking, they get water from the slum's "water point"—two hand pumps that draw water from an underground reservoir that is filled with piped water supplied by Dhaka's water utility.

The shantytown, named No. 2 Pura Basti or Burned Slum after it was damaged in a fire 15 years ago, is a cluster of tin and bamboo shacks that line narrow cobbled lanes flanked by open gutters. The shacks have electricity, but no running water or gas supply. The women cook food over wood-fired earthen stoves outside their shacks. There are no proper sanitation facilities in the slum.

In PTC Basti, another city slum at Nakhalpara, an industrial zone in Dhaka, before the water point was installed, the women used to spend hours at night or early morning collecting water from nearby factories or housing estates. "We used to wait in line and sometimes suffer insults or beatings from the house owners," recalls Chan Banu.

The Begums are some of the three million people—or about a third—of Dhaka's 11 million people who live in slums. The working poor, who are most of the slum's inhabitants, earn their living as construction or factory workers, lorry drivers, rickshaw pullers, or work in informal sectors as domestic helps, or trash pickers.

UNDP LIFE programme in Kalyanpur slum teaches women how to use water properly for cleaning, cooking and personal hygiene.

UNDP LIFE Photo

Mrs. Begum earns 1,000 Takas a month (about $17) making knitwear for export overseas, while her husband, Shah Alam, makes 1,800-2,100 Takas ($31-$36) monthly carrying passengers and goods in his three-wheel pedal rickshaw. Their eight-year-old son goes to a charity-financed school. The household's average monthly income is 3,000 Takas (about $52).

Most Bangladeshis live on less than a dollar a day. Every year, thousands of destitute victims of natural disasters pour into the cities from far-flung villages. The accelerated rate of urbanization means that nearly 25 percent of Bangladesh's 130 million people now live in urban areas, and municipalities and service agencies are unable to cope with the pressures of providing basic services.

Bangladesh has achieved remarkable success in supplying bacteria-free, safe drinking water to 97 percent of the population, mainly by sinking millions of shallow tubewells in the 1970s-80s. However, that success was undermined in the mid-1990s by the discovery of arsenic contamination of the groundwater, and it is estimated that 29 million of Bangladesh's 130 million people are still drinking arsenic-tainted water.

Clean water comes to the shantytown

Change came to the shantytown when a group of families got together and decided to ask a local non-governmental organization (NGO) for assistance in getting a proper and legal water connection.

"We all suffered for lack of water five years ago. So we got together and took a decision," says Rabeya Akhter, a slum inhabitant.

The problem was that the Dhaka water agency was authorized only to provide services to legal landowners and residents and deemed slum-dwellers, who live illegally on public or private land, as non-existent clients.

"We can only give water and sewerage connections to legal title holders of land or houseowners," says Mohammad Nurul Huda Mian, commercial manager of the Dhaka water agency.

But the situation has changed, somewhat. Since it has been established that the people who live in slums are willing and able to pay, the water authority is no longer reluctant to give them a water connection. "The law doesn't permit it, but now the rules are relaxed a bit due to social considerations," says Mr. Mian.

The change has been accompanied, in large measure, by a 1988 national water policy that recognizes the right of transient people to receive water and sanitation services, and a change in the law is under active consideration.

"We feel it is a basic human right to have water," says Mr. Mian. "We have to be practical. Slums will always be there and they need services. We must see slum inhabitants as potential clients who make a big contribution to society."

Photo: Mohammad Mostafizur Rahman/UNDP

Clean water for dinner is now close at hand.

About four years ago, the Dhaka city corporation, which owns the land occupied by the No. 2 Pura Basti slum, paved the dirt lanes and installed some community toilets. But these basic latrines, which are concrete rings set in the ground without any water or flushing facilities, drain into an open gutter, which in turn is linked to a nearby pond. The area reeks of garbage and human waste.

The city did not assign anyone the responsibility of cleaning or maintaining the toilets. "There is no way to dispose of garbage or sewage that builds up behind the toilets, which are always blocked," says Reno Begum, a housewife with three children. "We have to close our eyes when inside, and have to get a bath afterward."

Nearly 200-300 people, carrying pots of water, wait in long queues to use the toilets each morning, and bickering is common. The children and the elderly, who cannot make it on time, defecate in the gutters outside their homes.

"Before, we used makeshift latrines over the pond," says Mrs. Begum. Those latrines, she explained, were bamboo platforms hanging over the pond, curtained off by cloth for privacy. "Even that was better."

Bringing water to the shantytowns is one thing, using it properly is another. In an attempt to raise awareness of healthy practices, the LIFE programme supports visits by Shahida Akhter, a DSK community health worker, to No. 2 Pura Basti at least once a month. Using flash cards, she teaches proper use of water for cleaning, cooking and personal hygiene to members of the water point user group. At another meeting, Ms. Akhter reviews and evaluates the community's water sources and collection, using posters and flow charts sketched on brown paper.

"There are fewer outbreaks of diarrhoea and skin diseases, like scabies, in the slum now," Ms. Akhter reports. — *By Mollika Wahab*

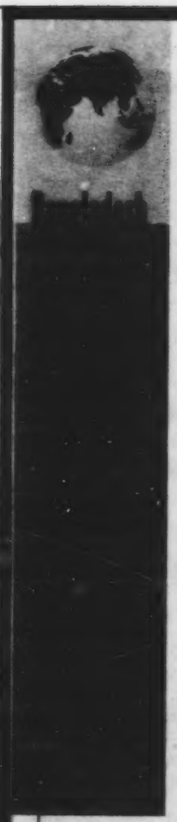
Mr. Mian. "We have to be practical. Slums will always be there and they need services. We must see slum inhabitants as potential clients who make a big contribution to society."

To work around the obstacles that prevented access to clean water, the residents of No. 2 Pura Basti approached a Dhaka-based NGO, Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK) for help.

DSK, an organization that has been working to promote health, clean water supply and sanitation in poor areas of Dhaka since the late 1980s, has established 88 water points in 70 slums, benefiting more than 200,000 people. About a dozen water points have been paid for and handed over to the user groups.

"Slum dwellers are willing and able to pay for services, they are not asking for charity," says Masudul Quader, DSK's programme director. "Besides, free services don't work. If they pay, they feel more responsible for sustaining the services."

In 1998, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through its Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment or LIFE, joined forces with DSK to empower community-based organizations to make the projects sustainable. LIFE, which helps city dwellers help themselves by



Access to clean water has reduced diseases in the slums and has allowed working poor more time to earn an income.

finding locally inspired solutions to local problems, funds small-scale, low-cost projects which are proposed, planned and executed by local communities.

"We help make communities more aware and strengthen their position to go ahead and demand more service provisions," says Tanzina Haque Hossain, national coordinator of LIFE in Bangladesh. LIFE in Bangladesh saw this work as an opportunity to popularize the idea of "local initiative."

"The slum inhabitants contribute valuable services and capital to the city," says Ms. Hossain. "When they are empowered through information and organization, you can see miracles happening—dirty lanes become clean, children get safe drinking water, and most of all, people do not feel they are at the mercy of others all the time."

UNDP has helped strengthen communities to push for more municipal services.

Establishing a water point

"When we visited the slum area to provide health-care, they asked us for a water point," says Kalim Ullah, DSK's coordinator for water and sanitation projects. It took nearly a year of meetings with community members to assess their needs, select a site, fix rules for water use and rates, and outline management plans. But eventually, the slum had its water point approved by DSK.

To install the water point, DSK loaned the slum community nearly 43,000 Takas ($740), which was sponsored by an international donor agency. Thirty-four out of the slum's 500 families then formed a user group, which is charged with managing the water point and ensuring payment of water bills and loan instalments to DSK.

Once a source of tension in the slums, residents are now able to enjoy their water.

The user group annually elects a water-point operating committee consisting of nine women, who take care of the water point and collect payments. The women members take turns each month to act as caretaker for the day-to-day running of the water point. In addition, a supporting advisory committee of five men is also elected annually to ensure security and maintenance of the water outlets, and to settle any disputes over bill payments.

The 34-member families pay a fixed charge of 15 Takas per week for using the water, but they have learned not to overuse or waste. The committee also sells water to non-members, charging one Taka for a pitcher or bucket of water, and two Takas, for bathing or washing clothes. The collection is used to repay the DSK loan, water bills, maintenance costs and the caretaker's honorarium.

For the slum community, the piped water supply is still costly, yet it is far less than the two Takas, they had been paying for a 20-litre pitcher or bucket. "Hopefully in another year, we will be able to pay off the loan. Then the water will be cheaper, even half the price," says Rabeya Akhter, who is the operating committee's current cashier.

According to DSK's Dibalok Singha, the water and sanitation improvements in the slums may not lead to long-term solutions, but they are still important. "Slums may be illegal and temporary. But we provide the inhabitants with a healthy standard of living, a better quality of life while they are still there." ■

Mollika Wahab is a Bangladesbi freelance journalist who writes on development issues.

Slum residents still pay more for water than most, but less than what they used to pay.

Thirst for Water and Development Leads to Conflict in Yemen

New laws enacted to give communities larger role in water policy

BY MOHAMMED HATEM AL-QADHI

Al-Haima, Yemen

Al-Haima was once famous for its agriculture, especially grains. But now, the land has deteriorated, water is scarce, and the people are poorer.

"We are now short of water for irrigation, and we have to wait until it rains to plant some seeds," says Mohammed Ahmad Ghalib, a farmer. In the past, he recalls, there was plenty of water and it flowed on the surface of the ground.

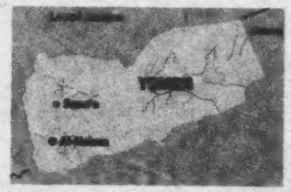
According to the villagers, the city of Ta'iz sunk several new wells into the Al-Haima area after assuring the farmers that it would only tap into the deep water, leaving the surface water for the villagers. The city also pledged to compensate the villagers, by providing them with electricity and water services, and new schools. But that did not happen.

"We used to have hand-dug wells for irrigation," says Mohammed Rasam. "But they went dry. Now, we are suffering. We have no water for agriculture or to drink."

Abdullah Kassim, an unemployed farmer says, "They recently installed water and electricity systems and now they want to bill us for our own water. We cannot spend the money we get from hard work on water bills. What will remain for our kids?"

The tension over the water ultimately led to clashes that called for high-level government intervention. "Ordinary people could not do anything," said Ghanim Mohammed Naser, who is in charge of a generator for pumping water for the village. "Those who resisted were arrested and put in prisons; those who refused to allow the drilling of wells were detained." Consequently, he said, the people have refused to pay for the diesel for the generator, which is not working.

But this is hardly the only time the government has had to intervene in water disputes. In 1999, it took 700 soldiers to quell the fighting that claimed six lives and injured 60 others in clashes that erupted between two villages fighting over a local spring near Ta'iz.



In the 1999 dispute, the village of Al-Marzuh believed it was entitled to exclusive rights from a spring because it was located on their land, while Quradah, a neighbouring village, believed they had the rights to the water based on a 50-year-old court verdict acknowledging their rights to the waters. The dispute festered and then erupted.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh had to intervene in the conflict; he summoned the sheikhs of the two villages to the capital, and sorted out the problem by dividing the water into halves.

Little water, huge demand

Disputes over water are not uncommon in Yemen. Water resources in Yemen are low, even by Middle East standards. In Yemen, the estimated per capita availability of renewable water resources was only about 133 cubic metres in 1994 and could be even lower now. The figure for the Middle East and North Africa region is 1,250 cubic metres and the world average is 7,500 cubic metres.

Photo: Mohammed Hatem Al-Qadhi/UNDP

Although there is growing demand for water in Yemen, much of the supply and distribution has been poorly managed.

Ownership of water springs has been the source of conflict in the Ta'iz region.

Water shortages are reaching emergency levels in some areas. According to a 2001 government report, there are absolute water shortages in Ta'iz and Sana'a, the capital, where public water supply is available for only 20 days and five days a month, respectively. At the same time, water consumption continues to rise each year, and now, is well above renewable water resources. Rainfall ranges between 50 and 200 millimetres in most of the areas, rising to 800 millimetres per annum in exceptional cases in some areas.

A high population growth rate of 3.5 percent each year has led to an increase in the demand for food and has caused migration to cities—which have grown at twice the national population rate. As a result, the demands of irrigated farms and thirsty cities have caused water consumption to rise sharply. The problem has been further compounded by the needs of industrialization and the further reduction in the supply of freshwater in some areas due to polluted aquifers.

A plan for water management

A major problem in Yemen was the absence of a central water authority and national water policy. Reform of Yemen's water sector has been a major goal of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Government of the Netherlands over the last decade. Recognizing the critical nature of water in Yemen, the project has fostered extended debate and discussion involving all major stakeholders in the water sector, resulting in a government-formulated blue print for water sector reforms. Among other things, the blue print calls for consolidating the water resources management functions under a single authority and putting in place legislative framework to support its functions.

The new agency, called the National Water Resources Authority, was established in 1995 and for the first time in Yemen, strategic considerations were given priority over competing interests. "The goal is to develop human resources and the institutional capacities for water management," says James Rawley, UNDP Resident Representative in Yemen.

Good governance to resolve conflict

Starting in 1997, a five-year programme to support the new authority, augmented by technical assistance from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, achieved several important milestones in terms of improving water governance and water resources management in Yemen. The entire country has now been divided into 14 water management zones based on hydro-geological criteria, providing the foundation for water resources management planning on catchment basis. The Water Authority has also formulated the national water policy and national water strategy.

The most important achievement of the Water Authority has been the enactment of the Water Law in August 2002, which set the rules and regulations for water usage and defines specific rights and penalties.

"Before it was difficult to take any action against violations," says Jamal Mohammed Abdu, the Authority Chairman. "With this law, we can now start implementing our policies and strategies."

According to Mr. Abdu, the Authority is now working with various government agencies and local administrations to implement the new law and he expects that this will result in more coherent activities that encourage water efficiency. In addition, water plans are being drafted for most regions in the country.

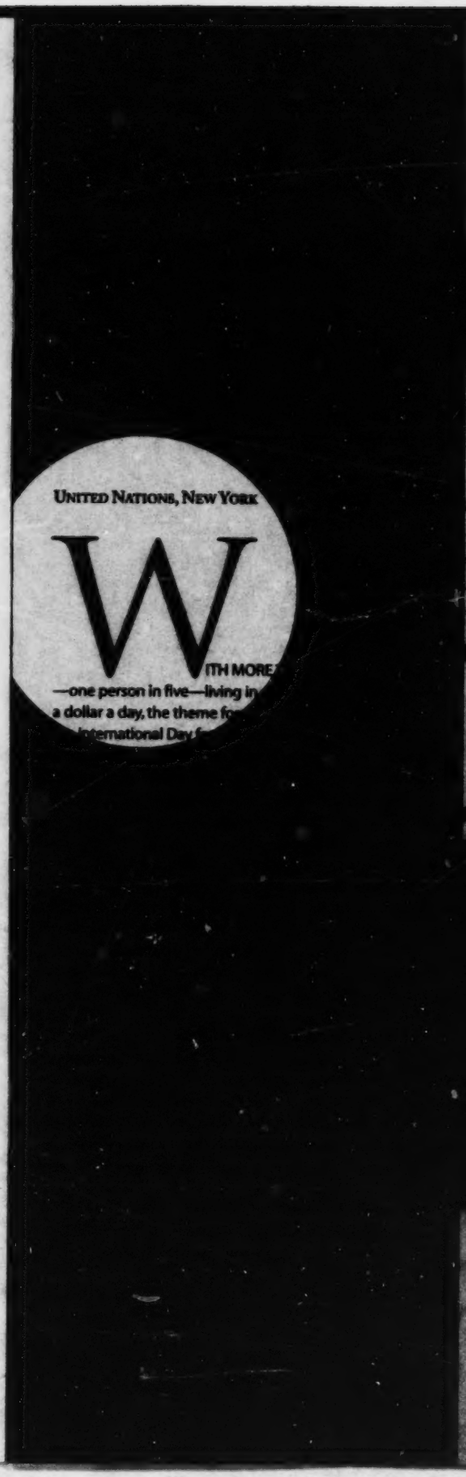
The plans aim to establish the institutional mechanisms for resolving water conflict by replacing the traditional top-down water management approach with a system where the water agencies and the local communities work together to manage the catchment water resources. It will also seek to define water rights in order to minimize and resolve conflicts over water resources.

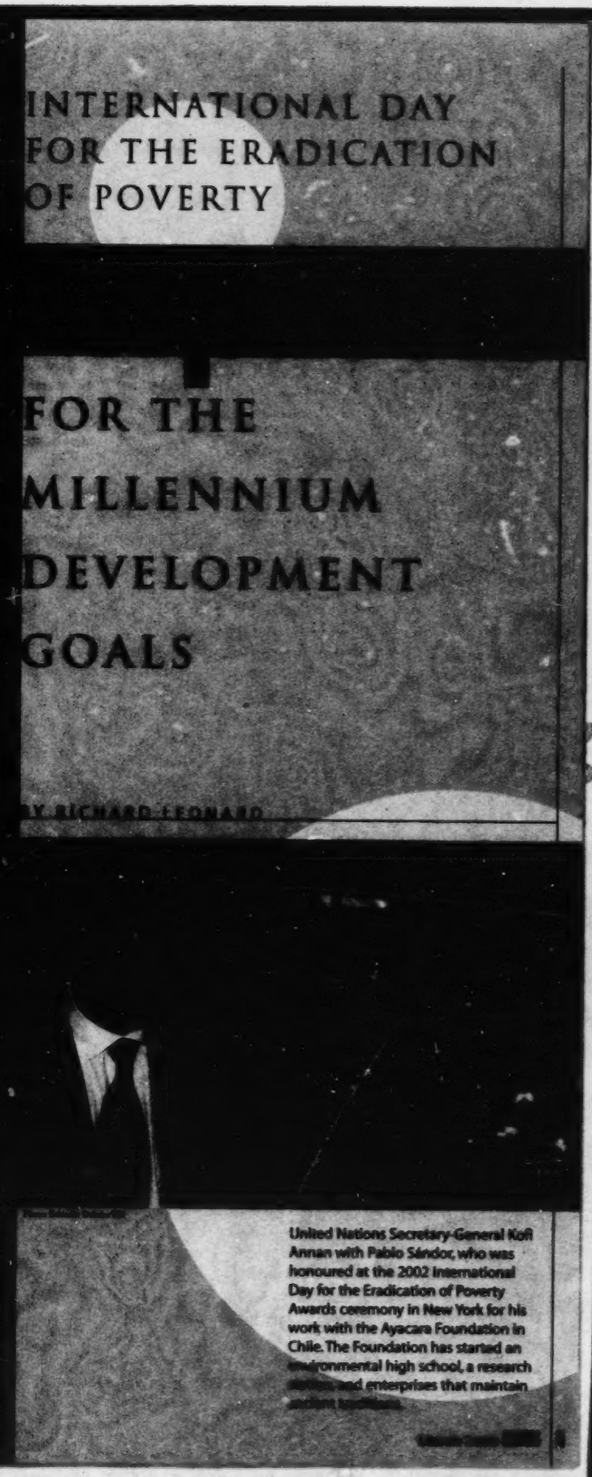
In the new plans for Ta'iz, a proposed system of legally recognized groundwater rights calls for safeguarding a lifeline supply of water for the poor, but makes the bulk of the remaining allotted water quotas tradable. The essence of the scheme is that it creates a win-win situation for the poor in the transfer of water from agriculture to other uses by creating a market in water rights. ■

Mohammed Hatem Al-Qadhi is a correspondent for the Saudi-based Riyadh Daily *and a Senior Editor at* Yemen Times.

New water laws are the first step toward managing existing resources for a population that is growing by 3.5 percent a year.

Past policies that promoted heavily irrigateri farms often left little water for small-scale farmers and gardeners.





United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan with Pablo Sándor, who was honoured at the 2002 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty Awards ceremony in New York for his work with the Ayacara Foundation in Chile. The Foundation has started an environmental high school, a research [illegible] and enterprises that maintain [illegible]

INTERNA
ERADICA

Women show off their handicrafts in Nouakchott, Mauritania.

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...works.

...s of Enda Goirgis, Eritrea, ...wn that was devastated in ...e border war with Ethiopia, ...ing the results of efforts to rebuild their livelihoods.

Georgian childr... help clean up the banks of the Kura River in Tbilisi.

New fishing boats and equipment launched in Angola.

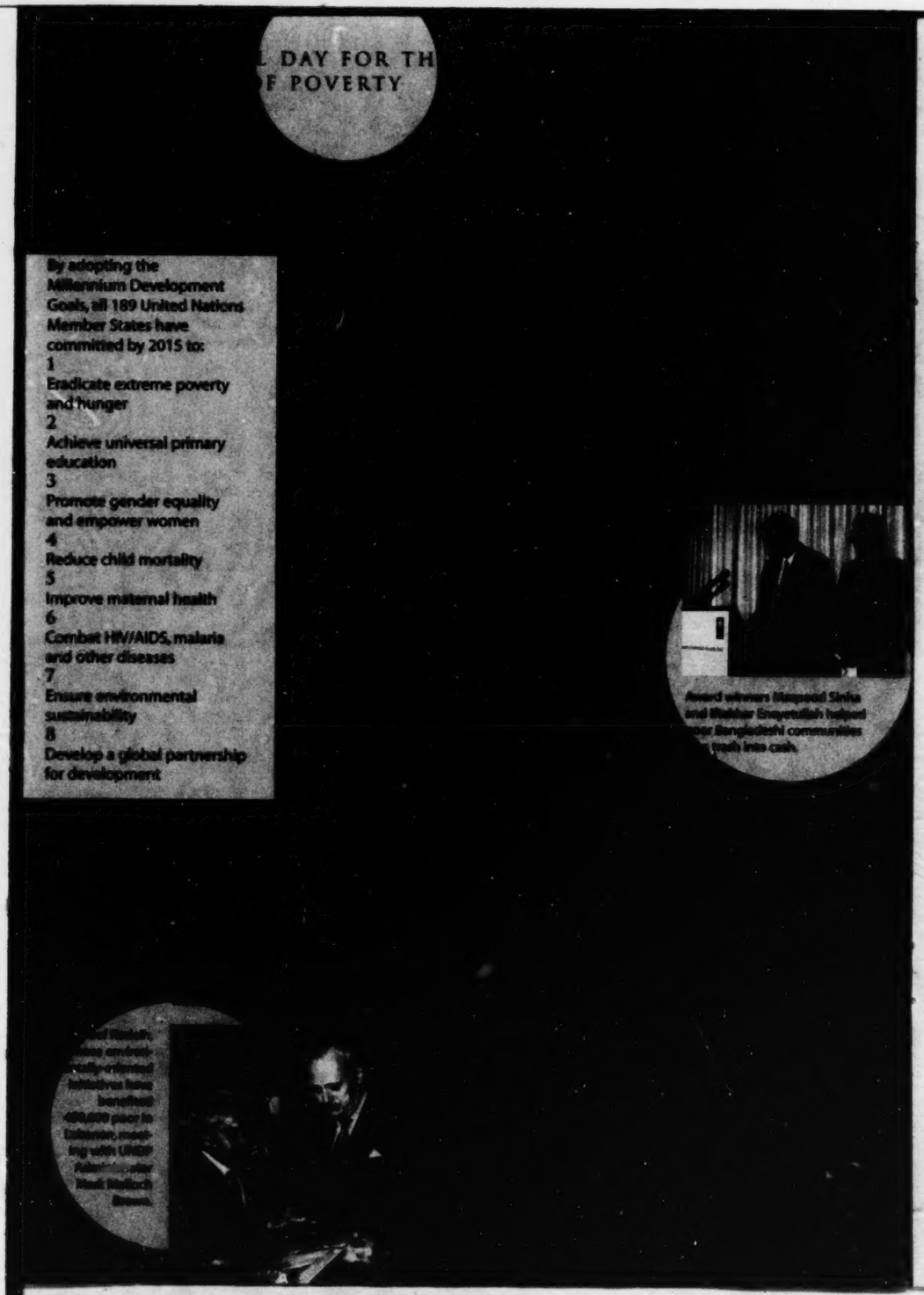
In Cuba, the results of a forestry programme in Cauto were on display.

UNDP Goodwill Ambassador and actor Danny Glover with Cuban Minister of Civil Aviation ... [illegible]

...Y IAN WILLIAN...

UNDP awarded Tirana Mayor Edi Rama a poverty reduction award for his work in cleaning up his ... dozed clear. It was t... one of UNDP's in... last year.

An artist, ... of Cult...



By adopting the Millennium Development Goals, all 189 United Nations Member States have committed by 2015 to:

1
Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2
Achieve universal primary education
3
Promote gender equality and empower women
4
Reduce child mortality
5
Improve maternal health
6
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7
Ensure environmental sustainability
8
Develop a global partnership for development

Award winners Mingaraid Sinha and Shahidur Rahman helped poor Bangladeshi communities [illegible] cash.

World AIDS Day: New Priorities Needed to Reverse Spread of Disease

BY NICHOLAS GOUEDE

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK

The world marked World AIDS Day on 1 December 2002 with seminars, cultural and sports activities and hope amid grim statistical data which show the raging epidemic claiming more millions of lives and outsmarting efforts to control it.

In Burundi, UNDP and other UN country team members joined the government, civil society groups and young artists in sponsoring events to raise awareness about the impact of the disease on women and development. The activities focused on the role of community leaders in their efforts to fight stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV; in Thailand, UNDP and other UN agencies provided support to the National Students Network for AIDS Prevention to organize awareness raising events in Bangkok on the theme "Live and Let Live: Thai Teens to Combat Stigma and Discrimination," which is also the theme of the 2002-2003 World AIDS Campaign.

The World AIDS Day activities highlighted how the epidemic had spread to every corner of the world. A new UNAIDS report, "AIDS Epidemic Update," indicated that 42 million people around the world are now living with HIV/AIDS and that the vast majority of them are in Africa.

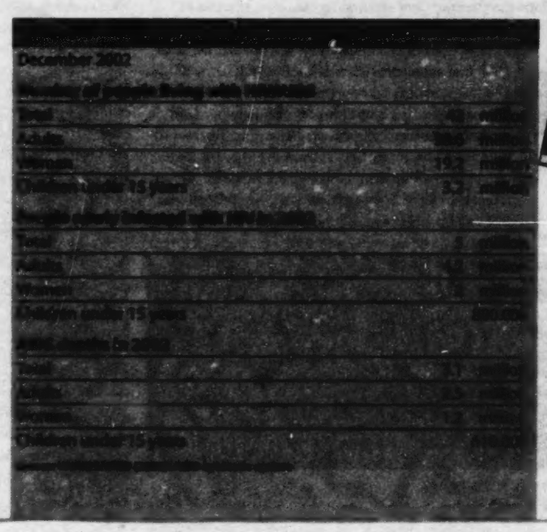
In 2002 alone, there were five million new HIV infections and 3.1 million deaths. The report revealed that for the first time, half the people living with HIV/AIDS are women, mainly as a result of sexual intercourse with infected men. According to UNAIDS, of the 38.6 million adults living with HIV worldwide, 19.2 million are women. These figures include both those who are infected with HIV and those who have AIDS. Of the 4.2 million adults newly infected this year, two million are women. Women accounted for 1.2 million of the 2.5 million deaths from AIDS in the world last year.

In sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 3.5 million new infections occurred in 2002, while the epidemic claimed the lives of an estimated 2.4 million Africans. In Asia, relatively low HIV/AIDS prevalence rate hide the fact that almost one million people in Asia and the Pacific contracted HIV in 2002, and an estimated 7.2 million people are now living with the virus. A further 490,000 people are estimated to have died of AIDS in the past year.

UNAIDS Executive Director Dr. Peter Piot points to some hopeful signs, including successful AIDS awareness campaigns in Africa. "HIV prevalence has dropped among young inner-city women in Addis Ababa and young pregnant women in South Africa," he said. Other signs of hope show that leadership within inter-governmental organizations can play an important role in the fight against AIDS.

In his annual World AIDS Day message, UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown urged greater efforts to begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. "Halting the spread of HIV/AIDS is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals—and it is no exaggeration to say that unless the world meets this one, it has little prospect of meeting the others, particularly the overarching target of halving extreme poverty by 2015." ■

Nicholas Gouede is a Communications Officer in UNDP New York.



Belarus: Restoring a Water Ecosystem

New efforts seek to improve water quality, protect natural habitats, and promote jobs

BY VLADISLAV KHILKEVICH

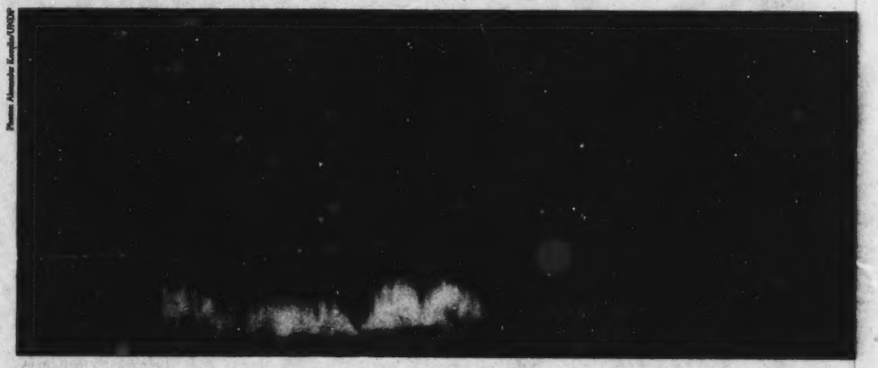


Photo: Alexandre Kouzlin/UNDP

The restoration of the Polesie wetlands has attracted increasing numbers of migrating birds, including the aquatic warbler.

Povitye, Belarus

There were always plenty of fish and ducks in the waters near the small village of Povitye, Belarus, located in the heart of one of Europe's largest wetlands. But that changed during the 1980s, when over a million hectares of wetlands were drained as part of an ambitious former Soviet-era land reclamation project.

Faced with a scarcity of farm land, a constant threat of flooding and a high demand for food, almost half of the Polesie wetlands, a huge expanse of relatively flat, isolated and water-logged territory that covers about 30 percent of Belarus, were drained and state farms were established.

At first, residents thought it was a good idea. "When the marshes were first drained," recalls Ivan Teteruk, a long-time Povitye inhabitant, "we had an impressive harvest of potatoes, wheat and barley for the first two or three years. All the barns were full of grain. And then, it seemed, the land just started to deteriorate."

The marshes near Povitye are part of a major wetland system that is now receiving renewed attention. Located on the Pripyat floodplain, the waters from the wetlands flow into the Dnieper River on its way to the Black Sea, helping to make it the third largest river system in Europe, after the Danube and the Volga rivers. But due to high pollution levels all along the river basin, 40 percent of the drinking water taken from the Dnieper in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine does not meet water quality requirements for the 22 million people who depend on the river.

The river has been abused throughout much of its 2,200 kilometre long journey, suffering from heavy industrial and agricultural pollution; only 45 percent of municipal waste that is dumped into the river is treated. But the problems start in the headwaters of the river's many tributaries, such as the Pripyat River, where drainage projects and deforestation, along with radioactive pollution from the Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident, have seriously degraded the ecosystem.

Forty years ago, Mr. Teteruk and his neighbours recall, the floodplain of the Pripyat River was 20-30 kilometres wide. Today it scarcely is limited to three to four kilometres wide, the land is not economically suitable for farming, and the problems of flooding have not abated.

Still extensive and isolated, the wetlands cover only a fraction of the area they once did.

New generation moves on

As the land deteriorated, so did the villages in and around the Polesie wetlands. Virtually a whole generation of young people has left the region in search of work, leaving only the elderly behind. In Krivoye Selo, which in its heyday was considered a large village, there are only three elderly women remaining. And in Kudrichi, on the banks of the Yaselda River, there are less than 10 remaining inhabitants, all elderly, who use the wood from abandoned homes as fuel, for the forests have been decimated.

Long-term residents of Kudrichi recall that before World War II, the village had about 700 inhabitants. Cut off from the "big land" for most of the year, residents recall a time when the region drew hunters and sportsmen from all over. According to the villagers, people from America used to come to hunt and the village used to rent out part of a marsh. Revenues were spent on village needs.

Preserving wildlife, promoting jobs

In addition to contributing to efforts to clean the Dnieper Basin water downstream, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is supporting two projects aimed at preserving the unique region of Polesie and its natural habitats through wetlands management techniques. The projects also seek to promote economic development in the region through ecotourism by providing innovative policy advice and linking partners through pilot projects that help people build sustainable livelihoods.

The region is rich with wildlife. Almost half of the world's population of the aquatic warbler nests in the Polesie marshes, and there are thousands of waterfowl, including several hundred white stork couples, 12,000 black and white-wing tern couples, along with thousands of redshanks, black-tailed godwits and great snipes. The open meadows and marshes of the Polesie are home to various birds of prey, rare in Europe, such as the great spotted eagle, white-tailed eagle, short-toed eagle and great grey owl. In addition, hundreds of thousands of wild geese stop here for rest and feeding during migration periods.

But for the most part, the significance of the Polesie is lost on even the people who live in and around the wetlands. In the village of Kuradovo, residents explained that they were not aware that the Polesie wetlands were unique until UNDP began to distribute posters in every village shop about the projects.

Reversing the environmental damage to the region will not be easy. In some cases state farms still work the land reclaimed from the marshes, although there is little economic gain. The projects' Chief Scientific Adviser Alexander Kozulin explains that the costs of sowing and harvesting these lands are much higher than the profit. "These lands are registered as agricultural lands," he says, "and if no agricultural activity is carried out, the state farms will be subject to penalties. Therefore, the removal of inefficient lands from agricultural use and their transfer to the natural reserve register is beneficial for state farms."

Sergey Dmitrenko/UNDP

Few younger people remain in the villages in the Polesie wetlands. Often, after a death, surviving villagers use the wood from homes as fuel.

Already, the project has brought all the water users in the region together to agree on new regulations for the use of water resources as well as for the development of engineering and construction projects. The new efforts may have a quick payoff. "We expect that the implementation of these activities will ensure the optimal conditions for nesting of the aquatic warbler in the Sporovsky reserve this spring," Mr. Kozulin says.

UNDP-sponsored activities have cleared floating vegetation from the Yaselda river channel in four places. These huge islands of vegetation produced a damming effect during floods in summer when birds are breeding and as a result, all the nests were destroyed and nestlings killed.

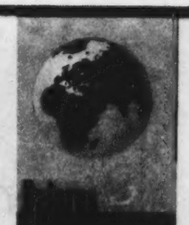
Although subcontractors were originally sought to do the work, ultimately, it was people from the surrounding villages who were contracted to "do the job" and remove floating vegetation. They constructed special wooden floors across the mire and used hand-made tools to "tear" the floating vegetation from the bottom and then break it into smaller pieces to float downstream.

Apart from additional, although temporary, income, it turned out that the local people learned about the aquatic warbler and UNDP from the activity rather than through more traditional "awareness raising activities."

As a result of preservation efforts, the aquatic warbler has already soared in popularity among local residents, according to Mr. Kozulin, who adds that there is considerable local support for further involvement in the practical management of the valuable protected sites where they live.

"The Polesie today, has some of the best examples of undisturbed nature, but it also has some of the worst examples anywhere of what man can do to nature," says Neil Buhne, UNDP Resident Representative in Belarus. Where there are large areas of unspoiled wetlands adjoining the Pripyat River unique in the world, there are larger areas that are drained, and even greater amounts of land and wetland contaminated by nuclear fallout from the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe. "The work supported by UNDP through preserving natural areas, and 'renaturalizing others' shows that Belarusians can both protect the natural areas they retain, and undo some of the damage done in the past," he adds. ■

Vladislav Khilkevich is a journalist working for the Information Unit of the United Nations Office in Minsk, Belarus.



Palestinians See Water Issues as Priority in Search for Peace

Searching for solutions in troubled times

BY ISABELLE HUMPHRIES

Wadi Gaza, Gaza

Ask farmer Ibrahim Abu Imhadi how valuable the new rainwater harvesting pond is to his greenhouses, and he points to the rows of lush tomato laden plants and replies, "It doubled my yield."

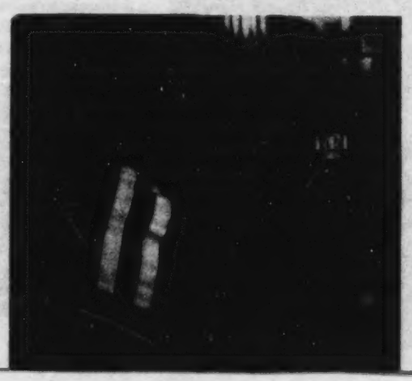
Gazan groundwater resources are becoming more scarce and more polluted by high nitrate and saline content, and fresh groundwater is decreasing at an alarming three to four percent each year due to overuse and extraction. As a result, farmers here are always looking for more effective ways of gathering rainwater.

Photos: Imru Rabadi/UNDP

Water for agriculture, drinking and sanitation is a priority issue for Palestinians.

"Before the new water harvesting pond was in place, I used an inefficient system of collecting rainwater on plastic sheeting," explains Abu Imhadi. "Now with the new pond, I am getting twice as much fruit from each *dunam* (about a quarter acre) of my land."

Poor water resource management practices of the past have allowed potentially good agricultural land in Wadi Gaza to go to waste. But since the introduction of new water collection and irrigation techniques by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in a project funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Global Environmental Facility, Abu Imhadi is benefiting from one of 50 artificial rainwater collection ponds created in the area. The 200 square metre capacity ponds collect the rainwater that falls on his greenhouse rooftops —water which would otherwise be lost. Through the efficient use of water resources, farmers can irrigate up to 10 dunams, and dramatically increase productivity. The project is part of a larger effort, the restoration and preservation of the wetlands of Wadi Gaza, and is one of the largest UNDP projects in the region.



Waste water from washing is recycled for toilets at the El Yarmouk Boys High School, West Bank.

This boost to the yield is particularly welcome to Abu Imhadi at a time when he faces severe financial difficulties due to escalating political tensions and the military closure of Palestinian lands. While the difficulties of confronting a major water crisis are monumental even in peacetime—the problem is infinitely magnified within the uncertainty of the Palestinian-Israeli context. About 160 West Bank localities remain unconnected to the water network, and infrastructure development has progressed very slowly since the military closures began. At the same time, the Gazan population continues to soar even as underground water reserves become further polluted. Addressing the water crisis has proved to be a priority in the search for peace and stability in the region.

Sewage threatens Gazan water supply

Water pollution in Gaza is not only caused by seawater and agricultural run-off seeping into the underground aquifer, but also by raw sewage. The Gaza Aquifer, which provides about 96 percent of water to the Gaza Strip, is becoming increasingly endangered by poor sewage disposal infrastructure. Many of the refugee camps and residential areas on the edges of the main towns are not connected to the central pumping system, leaving sewage to flow in the streets. In addition to the obvious immediate health risks, raw sewage will eventually reach the underground aquifer, polluting the water for the whole population.

As part of a $3 million UNDP project, financed by the Government of Japan to rehabilitate Gazan municipal infrastructure, the Al Hatabia neighbourhood in Beit Lahia has been transformed by the building of a sewage pumping station. "I just cannot compare the streets before and after," says Beit Lahia Mayor Muhammad al-Masri. Previously, Al-Hatabia had not been connected to the central sewage system, and waste gathered in percolating pits. The regularity with which such pits need to be emptied meant that sewage frequently overflowed into the streets, a problem that became particularly acute for Beit Lahia, a town with a population of 40,000, where approximately 50 percent of neighbourhoods are connected to the central sewage system.

Ibrahim Abu Imhadi's tomato yields have doubled.

Accessing water in the West Bank

Unlike Gaza, where water quality is the issue, the urgent need in the West Bank is access to clean drinking water. According to the Israeli non-governmental organization Btselem, the average Palestinian consumes only 65 percent of the USAID/World Health Organization recommended 100 litres of water per day. With the Palestinian population increasing and the entire region suffering from water shortages, there are indications that this already inadequate consumption figure will decrease.

"The situation for many Palestinians is desperate," says Nabil El Sharif, chair of the Palestinian Water Authority. "Some people have to rely on animals to fill tiny containers and transport them back to their homes." Even where localities have piped water systems in place, he says, the infrastructure is so poorly maintained that it wastes precious resources. The problem has escalated in the past months as heavy army vehicles have damaged pipes and tanks, and strict curfews prevent repair. Military checkpoints cause difficulties for water delivery by truck, and the building of military and security infrastructure, such as the wall next to the West Bank town of Qalqilya, has cut off access to key drinking and agricultural water supplies.

As a temporary measure, to tackle the emergency concern of lack of clean drinking water, UNDP has provided 28 water tankers so far, and is preparing to bring 13 more with funding from the Government of Luxembourg. UNDP provides water at the lowest market prices, and in addition, provides employment for drivers.

The Japanese Government recently donated 16 ten-thousand litre capacity water trucks. "Our mission is to let the Palestinian people know that they are not alone," says Takeshi Okubo, Head of the Representative Office of Japan to the Palestinian Authority. As he spoke, four trucks were already responding to a breakdown in the Jenin water network.

"The drinking water provided to us by the tanker trucks," says West Bank resident Ibrahim Abu-Rad, "is considerably better, and we notice a sharp drop in water-borne diseases, particularly among children, in our village."

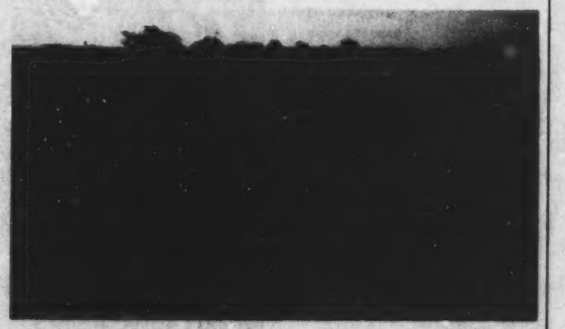
Raising awareness

The El Yarmouk Boys High School has a new system for recycling water from schoolyard basins. The water used for washing hands is filtered and collected in a pit, and from there, it is pumped to a separate water tank on the roof, which provides the water for flushing toilets.

UNDP is hosting and conducting workshops and activities for students and teachers to understand the importance of water recycling for the future of the community.

Public awareness is an essential component of UNDP's approach to the water crisis. Increasing understanding of the global and regional water crisis is part of UNDP's community environmental awareness programmes, run in conjunction with Palestinian schools, universities and municipalities. ■

Isabelle Humphries is a freelance journalist based in Jerusalem. She also writes for a variety of publications, including the Cairo Times.



Through more efficient irrigation in Gaza, farmers can increase productivity.

Haiti: Economic Turnaround in Villages Pegged to Clean Water

Years of apathy and distrust still an obstacle to community ownership

BY WALTER BERTSCHI

Photo: Walter Bertschi/UNDP

Isolated towns in northeast Haiti are pinning their economic hopes on better roads and cleaner water.

Mont Organisé, Haiti

It hasn't been easy to make a living in the towns that dot the hilly countryside of Northeast Haiti, where tending livestock produces just enough for the dinner table and little else for trade.

"To make ends meet," says Gabriel Jacques, the mayor of the town of Mont Organisé, "people work several months a year in the Dominican Republic. But they would prefer to stay here."

The villages in the region are isolated—the roads to these settlements dispel any illusions: vague tracks along the sides of the bluffs, a tire coming off the rim of a wheel, defeated by the knife-edged flints all over the road.

Degraded land and weak governance systems are major contributing factors to why only half of Haiti's eight million people have access to a clean supply of drinking water. But finding and tapping into clean sources of water is only part of the problem—the other part is managing water resources, and that is why the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) are working with four communities in the region to expand access to safe water by establishing viable systems that allow people to manage their water needs.

As part of UNDP's effort to advocate for change and connect countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life, the project, which is planned to last five years, aims to bring a permanent supply of drinkable water to about half of the population of the region—nearly 40,000 people. One of the main goals of the programme is to provide assistance that allow the people in this part of Haiti to overcome old attitudes that prevent the development of homegrown solutions.

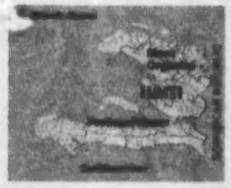
Community management of water pump in Savane Longue has had to overcome apathy and mistrust.

A solar-powered reservoir

Hopes are high that an investment in a long lasting, low maintenance solar-assisted water pump will have a major impact on Mont Organisé. Mayor Jacques says he expects the project to revitalize production and hope in the village of one, two or three thousand people—even the mayor is unsure, and no census has been taken in years. "It is hunger that drives the wolf out of the woods. If there was economic activity in Mont Organisé, the young people would remain." He adds, "With the new pump and good governance of water, Mont Organisé will change a lot."

New solar-powered pump under construction in Mont Organisé.

The new pump is expected to be up and running in April. The town, situated on a small hill, has no water running through it but does have a significant water table below ground. To tap this water and ensure a dependable supply of drinking water, UNDP and UNCDF, in support of the government, sunk a borehole. Judging by the bed of size-sorted gravel at the bottom of the borehole, the prognosis looks good—there will be no shortage of water. Work on an 80 cubic metre reservoir and a distribution network of six water distribution points around the town reservoir is in its final phase; only the solar panels have yet to be installed. Distribution kiosks have been hooked up and ready to operate as soon as the water starts to flow through its white plastic veins. The total cost will be somewhere between $80,000 and $90,000—two-thirds of it for the photovoltaic solar-cell panels—which are being kept under lock and key at the mayor's office until they can be installed this spring.



But the project is not only about hardware. In Mont Organisé, where disagreements have historically run deep, it was something of a first when the project brought the community together to set priorities. A committee, made up of representatives of civil society, the administration, and politicians, agreed that clean drinking water was an absolute priority and the committee will be responsible for maintaining the project.

The Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation, the partner non-governmental organization in the project, will be responsible for follow-up after the water starts flowing. For the time being, the town is enthusiastic and optimistic that the new water supply is a harbinger of greater changes to come.

Overcoming reluctance to support community

Except for the first few bucketfuls of water drawn from the Goulen Crossroads hand pump in Savane Longue, which tend to be muddy, the water in the community is now safe and drinkable. A borehole-drilling team had the good luck to drill into an aquifer between two impermeable strata, 77 feet down, which ensures good clear water, and lots of it.

The people of Savane Longue using the hand pump confirm that there have been fewer cases of sickness since the pump was installed at the Goulen Crossroads. Now in operation for 18 months, the hand pump supplies water to more than 100 families, about 700 people in all. The pump is managed by a three-member committee, which includes a technician trained in maintenance. A committee of villagers monitors the pump during the hours of operation, a total of 10 hours spread over each day.

The key to this project is that everyone who uses the pump is supposed to help support it. But not everything works perfectly, and some committee members say they are discouraged by the lack of enthusiasm shown by the local people toward paying their shares, however small. They say that centuries of slavery, dictatorship or paternalistic assistance have left their mark.

Some members are discouraged because some people have stopped paying their dues after only four months. There is a feeling, they say, that with the pump working, people consider that it is theirs, or that it has been provided by the government. But they maintain that, relatively speaking, everything is working reasonably well, even after 18 months, and note that there are fewer sick children in the village.

According to project officials, the same problems and shortcomings occur in the villages as in urban society. Alain Grimard, the project's principal technical adviser, says he was surprised by the scope of these attitudes but he has not lost hope. "This is without a doubt the sweetest project I have ever been given the chance to run. Here I don't have a sectoral approach, it is global," he says. "Good governance is the nexus for everything. Even though you need perseverance and time to get things moving, the progress will be solid and built to last."

But Mr. Grimard sees good reasons for hope. Unlike other roads in the district, the 10 kilometres of road into Savane Longue are smooth. All along the new communal road, financed by UNDP and UNCDF, people are at work, all by their own volition. This is their road, they say, and they are doing the maintenance on it because they know it is vital for their activities. ■

Walter Bertschi is currently Editor-in-Chief of the online press agency www.haitipressnetwork.com based in Haiti.

Water Wells an Engine of Growth in Central African Republic

New wells have generated funds for civic improvements

BY LINA EKOMO-IKOLI

Water pump in Bossongo has significantly changed the lives of residents and has generated optimism.

Photo: Tchilouta Jean-Paul/UNDP

Bossongo, Central African Republic

It was only a few years ago that the women of the village of Bossongo in the Central African Republic had to walk several miles to fetch water from the village's only well. Once at the well, they often had to queue for hours to draw just one bucket of water. If they were in a hurry, their only other option was to go down to draw water from the pools in unhygienic conditions and in unhealthy surroundings. The water was then used for all the family's daily needs, often resulting in disastrous health consequences, especially water-borne diseases.

Although hardly immune to the political and economic difficulties that have faced the Central African Republic in recent years, hope for a change for the better has returned to the people of Bossongo village, situated 55 kilometres southwest of the capital Bangui. This is due in part to the installation of water pumps that have been jointly financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Capital Development Fund to improve local living conditions.

For Doubalé Jasmine, the new wells have made a big difference. "In the old days, drawing water was very tiring because the well was deep and you needed a good length of strong rope," which she says, "cost a lot of money."

To facilitate access to drinking water for the villagers, four wells were drilled at different points in the village. While the villagers initially saw the project simply as a water project, no one could see that these wells were to become a source of income that would improve local living conditions.

According to Toussaint Mandokote, it all began when the community started to organize. "We set up a committee in charge of each well. And then to make the management easier, we merged the four committees into a single association, that we called ataloche, or "fulfillment."

Mr. Mandokote, now the Secretary-General of the ataloche, explained that water is sold at each well-head for between 10 and 25 CFA Francs a bucket. The money collected in this way is then placed in a savings account and is used to finance a wide range of village activities.

Funding civic improvements

First, Mr. Mandokote said, the money pays for the repair of pumps that have broken down. Selected youths from the villages have received training in pump maintenance with the income derived from the sale of water; some funds are also used to purchase spare parts.

The water fund also finances microcredit loans. The men and women from the village who request these loans are then able to start small businesses, and in turn, the income they earn is used to meet their families' needs. So far, these small businesses include running manioc mills or rickshaws and selling palm oil, wood for heating and various types of food businesses.

Pascal Languet, a beneficiary of a micro-credit loan said, "Thanks to these small businesses, we can now buy medicines for our children and pay for their schooling. We also use the money to hire labour to make our plots bigger."

In addition, Mr. Mandokote said, the funds have helped build the community infrastructure, including a health centre, a primary school and a local market. "For the dispensary, we have already selected two young people from the village, who will be trained by COOPI at the Mbaïki prefectoral hospital. This NGO has already trained two teachers locally to run the school. We are planning to recruit more youths to make up the teaching team."

According to one Bossongo parent, for building materials, UNDP and COOPI have supplied them with cement, corrugated sheets and wooden planks. "We paid for part of the imported materials from the funds collected by selling water, and we contributed local materials, such as baked bricks and stopes. Some of our young people were chosen to help the masons with the building work."

Payments for water have gone for schools, medicines, draft animals and small business loans.

The water fund has also paid for the purchase of oxen to work in the fields. The oxen belong to the community, and the farmers hire them in turn to plough their fields. "Thanks to the oxen," reports Jacques Kapou, a farmer, "we can increase our output without ruining our health."

Mr. Mandokote said that as a result of the fund, members of the water management committee have been able to travel to the nearby communities of Mbata and Mbaïki to exchange experience. "With these visits, we can learn from what others have been doing in order to improve our methods here in our village," he says.

But Mr. Mandokote said the people of Bossongo did not want to stop there. "Right now, our goal is to build a nursery school for the little ones. Later on, we shall save up to drill new wells because the village has grown bigger. For all these projects, we shall be relying not on government aid, but on our own determination to make progress."

Micro-credit generated by the water fund has helped Bossongo residents embark on new business ventures.

"What we would like," he concluded, "is for the experience our village has lived through to be shared with all the provinces of the Central African Republic in a drive to defeat poverty." ■

Lina Ekomo-Ikoli is a Public Affairs Officer in UNDP Central African Republic.

The next goal for Bossongo is to build a nursery school for the "little ones."

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni

Uganda has been at the forefront of the moves by the international community to draw up strategies for tackling poverty.

Uganda played a major role in the discussions on improving access to safe water and proper sanitation during last year's World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Will the country be able to meet the international goals of halving the proportion of people who lack access to clean water and proper sanitation by 2015?

The government is committed, and with support from our sector development partners, we will most likely meet these millennium targets by the year 2015. The national rural water coverage is about 55 percent and the urban water coverage is 65 percent. Therefore, about 9.6 million people in rural areas and 1.1 million people in urban areas lacked access to safe water as of June 2002. To meet the goal, we need to increase the rural water coverage by 22 percent to reach 77 percent coverage and the urban water coverage by 18 percent to 83 percent coverage by 2015. Approximately US$594 million is needed to achieve this goal for rural water coverage, and another $350 million for urban water coverage.

On sanitation, about 50 percent of households in rural areas use some form of sanitation facilities. It will be possible to meet the WSSD goal if communities and household[1] are effectively mobilized and sensitized. The urban areas are poorly served, with only 12 of the 33 large towns in Uganda having sewerage systems, but even then, in an appalling situation. Less than 10 percent of the urban population is connected to the sewers and the rest use pit latrines. For example, of Kampala city's over 1.2 million people, only eight percent are connected to the sewerage system. There is still a lot to be done to serve the remaining population. A master plan for sanitation is being prepared and we need to intensify our effort in mobilizing local and external resources for sanitation. Sanitation development, compared to water supply, is generally an expensive intervention.

How is Uganda mobilizing action to expand access to safe water and sanitation?

Provision of safe water and sanitation, their proper use and management are necessary conditions for good health and economic development. The government is undertaking a water sector reform to ensure that the services are provided and managed with increased performance and cost effectiveness to serve the entire population of Uganda. Two reform studies (rural and urban water and sanitation services) have been completed and have come up with a $1.5 billion investment plan to provide 100 percent service coverage to all Ugandans by 2015. In the meantime, the water for production and water resources management sub-sector reform studies are ongoing.

The government will use these investment plans to mobilize resources from both external and local sources. Our strategies, including the Demand Responsive Approach, allow us to involve all stakeholders and, in particular, the private sector.

Those are substantial amounts of resources required to improve access to safe water and sanitation in Uganda. What has the government done to mobilize resources?

Uganda was the first country to benefit from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief. The government has established the Poverty Action Fund to channel the HIPC funds and mobilize additional resources for priority programmes such as universal primary education, primary health care, and water and sanitation to achieve the objectives of our Poverty Eradication Action Plan. The government has established sector working groups, including one on water and sanitation, involving line ministries and development partners. These groups are tasked with mobilizing resources for the respective sectors, among other activities. The water sector policy, strategies and investment plans are key documents for resource mobilization.

The decentralization system of governance has been a major goal over the last several years. How has decentralization helped address the water and sanitation issues?

Decentralized governance in Uganda is the brainchild of my government and is a key policy element that was adopted in the 1995 Constitution and made into law (the Local Government Act 1997) that transferred functions and powers from the central government to local governments. Provision of water and sanitation services has been devolved to the local governments. Funds are channeled directly to local governments to enable them to plan and manage the services. Through decentralization, the people are empowered to take charge of their own affairs, and communities are actively involved in deciding on issues that affect them. The central government only provides support services.

How has the United Nations system contributed to the campaign for safe water and improved sanitation in Uganda?

The government has had considerable assistance from the UN since the 1980s, and rural water coverage has risen from a meagre five percent in 1981 to the present 55 percent. In addition, they helped us put in place a number of sector policies and strategies such as the Community Based Maintenance System, where communities have been responsible for the operation and maintenance of their water and sanitation facilities in rural areas since 1987. The districts and central government only provide backup support, for example by undertaking major repairs that are beyond the capabilities of the communities.

How has the private sector contributed to the campaign to expand water and sanitation, and what do you perceive as its role in achieving the WSSD goal?

The government's commitment to the privatization process provides a conducive atmosphere for private sector participation, in the form of consultants and contractors in the design, construction and management of facilities. The private sector has embraced this gesture with enthusiasm, and private operators are now responsible for all aspects of water schemes.

How do global targets such as the Millennium Development Goals, in practice, help to fight poverty and promote development?

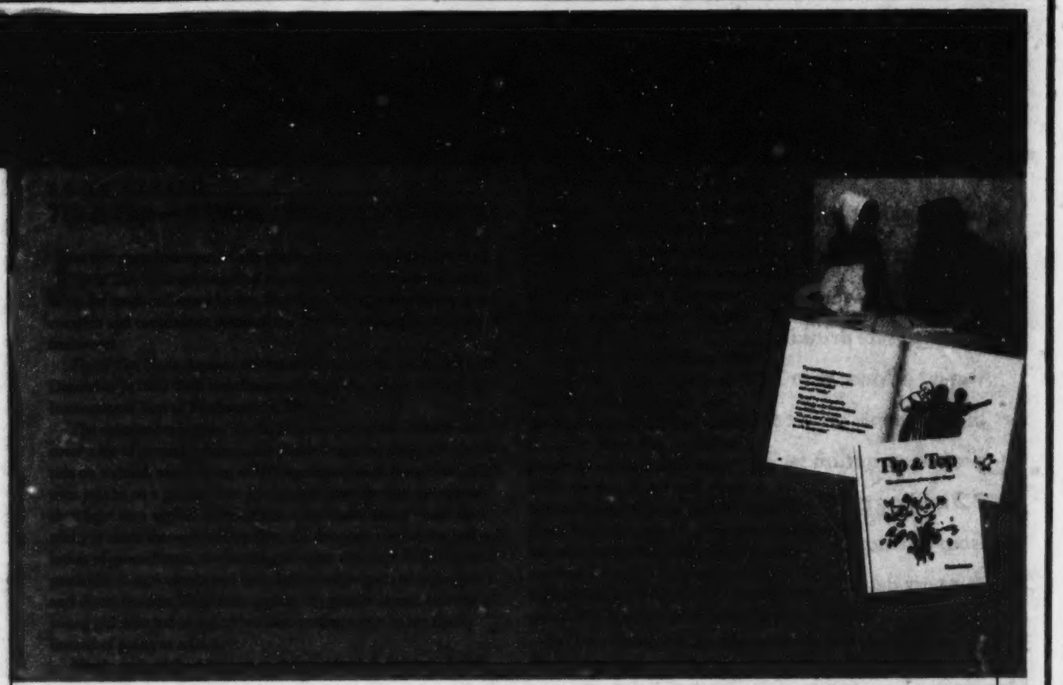
To begin with, the MDGs can help mobilize international financial resources to support developing countries. But what is even more important are the efforts by developing countries themselves, basing on the MDGs, to fight poverty and develop their economies. Note that, even before the international community agreed upon the MDGs (in September 2000), Uganda had already drawn up similar policies and targets for development and poverty eradication in 1997. Our plan sets out clear objectives to guide development policy in Uganda, such as the provision of universal primary education, safe drinking water, and the eradication of mass poverty by 2017. Thus, Uganda has been at the forefront of the moves by the international community to draw up strategies for tackling poverty. It is, therefore, important for developing countries, as they subscribe to this uniform set of goals, to formulate their own development targets based on their specific needs and objectives.

How is the present economic slowdown affecting Uganda's development plans, and how is the country coping with the situation?

The present slowdown in the world economy has not had a major impact on Uganda's economy. Uganda suffered from the slump in coffee prices, which has reduced coffee export earnings by two-thirds since the late 1990s. However, this decline in world coffee prices predates the current world economy slowdown, and is a result of specific conditions in the global coffee market. Uganda is able to cope with the current situation because the government exercises sound economic management, notably in terms of a stable macro economy founded on fiscal discipline, open trade policies and a flexible exchange rate. For example, our trade and exchange rate policies have stimulated the diversification of Uganda's exports, which has helped the economy adjust to the fall in coffee prices. While Uganda's coffee export earnings fell sharply over the last four years, non-coffee exports have expanded rapidly, almost doubling from $180 million in 1997/1998 to $346 million in 2001/2002. ■

Robin Cubitt/UNEP

Removal of invasive plant species, such as the water hyacinth, that are choking many of Uganda's freshwater sources.



Brazil's Cardoso Cited for Leadership in Human Development

National Human Development Reports with impact honoured

It has only been a dozen years since the term "human development" has become a benchmark of progress among nations, and to recognize the people who have made a difference in promoting development that genuinely improves the lives of people, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) awarded Brazil's outgoing president, Henrique Cardoso, with the first Mahbub ul Haq Award for Outstanding Leadership in Human Development.

The event, held in New York last December, also honoured the people who have helped prepare the National Human Development reports that have provided ideas for change in various countries, such as in Bolivia, Botswana, Chile, Indonesia, Nepal and the Arab region.

The measure of human development represents a major departure from traditional definitions of development, which often measure progress in strictly economic and financial terms. Human development looks beyond economic growth—which may or may not improve people's lives, and seeks to provide people with more choices and opportunities to pursue a better life.

"There is a sense that it's *other* things that change countries," UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown told the awards ceremony, "and you suddenly discover the obvious, that it's ideas. It's ideas in action, and the extraordinary thing about these Human Development Report Awards and the Human Development Reports that lie behind them is of groups of people—civil society leaders, government leaders, labour leaders, UN officials—coming together in countries and combining around a single powerful analysis of why there is poverty and what is needed to attack it and address it."

UNDP established the Awards for Human Development last June in an attempt to recognize and promote growing global efforts to find alternative solutions to development challenges that will bring benefits now and in the future. The Mahbub ul Haq Award, named for the Pakistani economist who pioneered the human development approach, will be awarded every other year to a Head of State or world leader who has successfully put human development at the heart of the political agenda.

In accepting the Award, President Cardoso said it seemed odd for a head of state to receive such an award as an individual, "because what Presidents do is invariably the result of collective endeavours. Ultimately, if a President is able to achieve something, it is because a whole nation, or at least most of it, stands behind him and supports him."

But the more he thought about it, he concluded that it "would be a unique opportunity to publicize and give further momentum to the efforts undertaken by the whole Brazilian nation. Because that is indeed what has taken place in Brazil over the last few years."

Botswana Minister of Health Joy J. Phumaphi, accepting the Excellence in Policy Impact Award, said the *Botswana National Human Development Report 2000* had played a major role in transforming government and civil society's approach to the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has pointed the country towards an AIDS-free generation.

"The report has acted as a rallying call to every stakeholder, the individual, the family, the community, the business sector, academia, NGO, CBO, the church, multinationals, government departments, UN agencies, to join the national strategy, because whether infected or affected, we are living with HIV/AIDS."

The awards were chosen by a panel of judges that included Princess Basma Bint Talal of the Jordan Hashemite Fund for Human Development, Kwesi Botchwey of the Earth Institute, Columbia University, Moisés Naím, former Venezuelan Minister of Trade and Industry and Editor of Foreign Policy, Gita Sen of the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, and Joseph Stiglitz, winner of the 2000 Nobel Prize in Economics, of Columbia University. ■

—By Nadine Shamounki, Communications Officer in UNDP New York.

Citizen Report Card for Karachi Water Management

KARACHI, PAKISTAN

It may not have surprised anyone that the Karachi Water Supply Board did not do well on its latest report card but perhaps the greatest surprise was that there was a report card in the first place, and it was real people who were doing the grading. And poor grades notwithstanding, the report card may be a harbinger of change for this city teeming with newcomers from the countryside.

Karachi's water system, like the water systems in many cities in the developing world, is under tremendous pressure. But because water resources are so poorly managed, many people have resorted to taking water that is unclean or getting their supply of water illegally because they have no choice in the matter.

In fact, the Karachi Water Supply Board estimates that in the low-income areas of Karachi, more than 60 percent of the water supply is obtained through informal means, such as by paying the linemen and the local officials to acquire connections, construct lines, maintain and operate systems for water supply.

There has never been much dialogue in Karachi, however, between the people who provide the water and the people who use it, and the result has been a system that does not work well. There was a real and immediate need to bring the various stakeholders together to start discussing the issues and the report card was a key element in starting a dialogue.

The exercise in Karachi, held in April 2002, was the first field test of the Report Card on Water and Sanitation designed by UNDP's Urban Governance Initiative—a regional project based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In looking at a number of urban governance issues, the main stakeholders such as the local government authorities, development authorities, bulk consumers, *katchi abadis* (informal settlements) residents, civil society organizations, the private sector and support agencies such as the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

At the end of the field test, both citizens and authorities acknowledged that many concrete lessons were learned. Citizens generally believed that while the Karachi water authorities had the ability to 'educate' them, it was not keen on sharing information. The residents voiced concerns that the local government has complete authority and discretion to manage the water supply, though they are never provided with complete information about the system and as a result, look for water supplies outside the system. And citizen groups also criticized the long ongoing practice of borrowing foreign funds for water and sanitation projects that had largely turned out unsuccessfully.

The process of bringing together the key stakeholders to the table is essential because it helps clarify the different interests that are at play. The stakeholders can then remedy the situation accordingly—here the government learned why it was important to bring the informal settlements into the formal system, while the citizens helped emphasize the need for rights-based laws as compared to rule-based laws regarding water. And the stakeholders can take that very first step towards participatory decision-making regarding life's fundamental necessity—water.

The field test of a report card for water services will be replicated. Already there is interest in the Philippines for a similar project to spur improvements to the water supply system. ■

—By Sivanantbi Thanentbiran, who works with the Urban Governance Initiative in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

MATTERS OF FACT

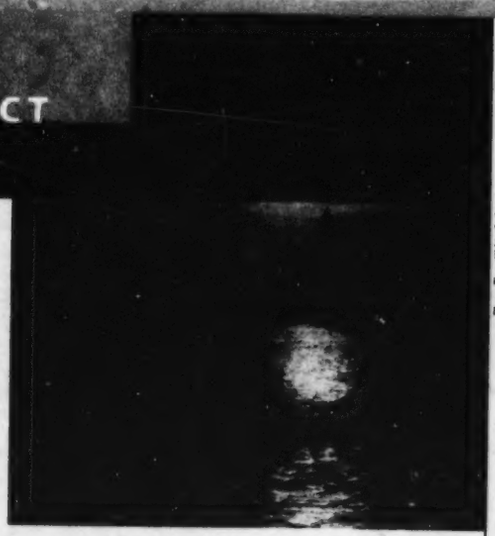


Photo: Ting Chien Seby

Of the more than six billion people in the world, at least 1.2 billion do not have access to **safe drinking water.** More than 2.4 billion people do not have **proper sanitation** facilities. Dirty water is deadly. More than **2.2 million people,** primarily in developing countries, die each year from diseases caused by **polluted water** and **filthy** sanitary conditions. Every day, diarrhoeal diseases cause some **6,000 deaths,** mostly among children under five. More than 200 tons of human waste are dumped daily into the world's rivers. While water covers 70 percent of the earth's surface, 97.5 percent is salt water. Although the remaining water is fresh water, three-quarters of that is **frozen in ice caps.** By 2025, nearly two-thirds of the world's population will live in **water stressed regions.** In the next two decades, **water use by humans will increase** by 40 percent and 17 percent more water will be needed to feed increasing populations in developing countries. Over the last 30 years, the share of rural families with **access to safe water** rose from 10 percent to about 60 percent. Presently, 70 percent of all available fresh water is used for agriculture, but because of **inefficient irrigation systems,** 60 percent of this water is lost.

Sources: UNDP Web site, UN Department of Public Information, "A Framework for Action on Water and Sanitation," prepared for WSSD.

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